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Preface

Welcome one, welcome all, to my collection of one-shots, written for contests here on Wattpad! I have been in the Warriors community here for quite some time now and only recently did I realize that I've never done a writing contest here. I figured it was a good way to get my name out there and make some new friends, so here I am starting a new collection of stories.

A quick note that each story follows the same three Clans, created specially for the purpose of contest-writing. FeatherClan, the main Clan, along with its neighbours, MoonClan and ShellClan, will be featured to various extents in each one-shot.

Enjoy!

A Twist of Fate | WattyClans WC R1

A Twist of Fate
WattyClans Writing Competition - Round One

An expanse of cloudless blue hung over the greenleaf forest, only the slightest of cool winds blowing through it to chill the trees far below. Aspen leaves and spruce needles alike seemed to sigh as the breeze cooled their sunburnt appendages. Nearby, a small bird ruffled its feathers, enjoying the respite from the harsh, glaring sun.

It hopped from one branch to another, peering down at the forest floor curiously with black, beady eyes. Chirping an easy tune, the sparrow spread its wings, ready to take off as it spotted some delicacy or other.

"Gotcha!" The she-cat caught the sparrow by the wing, bringing it down in one swift movement just as it bounced from the branch. Mouth full of feathers, the she-cat twitched her whiskers in pleasure.

"Look what I caught, Squirrelfoot," she said to a grey tom as she landed before him on the forest floor. Startled, the tom turned to see her prize.

"Great work, Rowanpaw," he praised. "You'll be the best bird hunter in the Clan yet!"

"Birds are FeatherClan's main source of prey," Rowanpaw replied. "We're even named after them. Making me the best hunter might be harder than you think."

"The daughter of two of the best hunters in the Clan?" Squirrelfoot countered. "I think we've got a fair chance!" He swatted her over the ear playfully with his tail - a signature move, as Rowanpaw had learned over the last five moons spent with her mentor. With any

luck, he would have her doing warrior assessments within the next moon. The excitable apprentice shook at the thought.

Squirrelfoot, noticing her sudden excitement, purred loudly. "Let's put that energy to good use, shall we? Race you up Giant Oak!" With a flick of his grey tail, the young mentor took off. Rowanpaw, competitive as ever, followed.

Catching up with the tom, who was named after his fleet-footedness, proved difficult, but Rowanpaw managed to level out the playing field as the two scaled the oak. It stood nearly twenty foxlengths tall, trunk twisted and weathered.

Her claws scratched at bark, finding paw-holds in the pockmarked trunk. Centuries' worth of warriors had climbed this tree before her and the oak bore their marks too, leaving Rowanpaw a clear map to follow.

Squirrelfoot reached the top before her and did not hesitate to crow his victory. The apprentice, however, took the defeat good-naturedly, too awed by the view to pay her mentor much mind. It was enough to leave her breathless every single time.

Looking out over the forest, she could see where the tree line ended and the meadows began, a thin line of rocks breaking the soft grass before it rolled into hills, then cliffs and, finally, mountains. The rock markers, left behind by an avalanche centuries ago, marked the border between FeatherClan and MoonClan.

On her other side, the trees thinned until they reached a river. This river, in turn, split in two, one branch heading for the Gathering Place - a small island cut off from the surrounding territories by the avalanche rocks and diverted river, which later flowed into the gorge that separated MoonClan and ShellClan - and the other flowing deep into ShellClan territory. The landscape became littered with small ponds and lakes there, the sun glinting off the water playfully.

Rowanpaw's heart thumped in her chest at the thought of all the adventure the territories offered. *Just imagine*, she thought, *all these places to explore, cats to meet, prey to be caught, battles to be fought...*

She took a deep breath, inhaling the sweet greenleaf scents of the forest to calm herself.

Her nose twitched as she caught the scent of a nearby starling. Mouth watering at the prospect of more freshkill, the tabby snapped out of her daze. Peering through the twisting branches of the oak, she caught sight of the black and white bird on a branch a ways below her. Glancing at Squirrelfoot, who had also caught sight of the prey, Rowanpaw unsheathed her claws. Her mentor gave her an affirmative nod.

Scaling the tree carefully, she kept her body pressed close to the trunk, brown tabby pelt blending in to the wood around her. The starling began to sing as the apprentice reached the branch right above it, completely unaware of her presence.

Tail straight to keep her balance, Rowanpaw slid along the branch, moving skilfully along its length until she knew she was within reach of her target. The wood creaked, growing thin beneath her, and she halted to make sure the branch could withstand her weight. Reassured, she crouched down, tensing her muscles, ready to drop onto the branch below.

Then, she heard a sound so faint it might have been an acorn dropping to the earth.

Fear coursing through her, she scrambled for safety, dropping onto the starling below, claws hooking into the bird's body as the branch she stood on moments before broke from the oak and crashed to the forest floor.

A moment of relief.

Then, a plummeting feeling as she realized the bird was the only thing in her grasp.

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At first, the images were fuzzy: a glimpse of sunlight glinting off water; a flash of black and white and red; a blur of branches, twisting and turning up and away.

Then, the images became faces, each one vastly different except for the eyes, which reflected worry, sorrow and regret.

The first face Rowanpaw could consciously remember was that of her sister, Shadepaw, as she stared down at her with wide copper eyes. In them, Rowanpaw saw her reflection and wondered at how her fur had grown so messy, her paws so twisted. The pain would distract her then and, before she could take a better look, the poppy seeds worked their magic and made her drift away.

The next face was that of Stormwatcher, the Clan's medicine cat, resigned and weary as his paws fiddled with sticks and leaves and cobwebs. What he was doing with them Rowanpaw did not know.

The faces of Acorntail and Kitewhisker flashed before her eyes too - her mother distraught, her father disappointed. Some nights, the apprentice opened her eyes to see Ravenstar conversing with the medicine cat, voices hushed and hurried.

But the face that haunted Rowanpaw when she drifted in and out of consciousness did not belong to any of these cats. In her nightmares, it was Squirrelfoot's hazel eyes, full of fear and pain, that made her shake and yowl; his voice screaming her name as she fell into darkness.

When the haze finally lifted and she could keep her eyes open for more than a couple of heartbeats, Rowanpaw found herself completely alone. She lay on her back, the interwoven branches of the medicine den above and soft moss underneath. Rather uncomfortable in the position, the tabby tried to roll herself over.

She suddenly became aware of how heavy her bottom half felt. Muscles aching as she attempted to lift herself to her paws, she groaned as the weight became to much. She fell back to the ground with a grunt. Confused, and the fear in her chest growing, the apprentice turned to her back legs.

"Rowanpaw!" Shadepaw's clear voice split the medicine den and the black she-cat was suddenly by her littermate's side. She covered her ears and forehead with short, quick licks and Rowanpaw squirmed, reminded very much of their mother.

"How are you feeling?" Stormwatcher's steady voice interrupted. Rowanpaw stayed silently, staring in horror at her twisted back leg.

"You suffered a break in your left leg and a fracture in your right," Shadepaw explained quietly. "You'll be able to use your right leg once you build its strength back up. Your left..." The medicine apprentice trailed off.

"Your left leg will be of no use," Stormwatcher finished bluntly.

Rowanpaw continued to stare in disbelief, emotion bubbling deep within her.

"But what about becoming a warrior?" she finally choked out. *What about climbing trees and catching birds and exploring the territories and fighting for the Clan and...*

Stormwatcher and Shadepaw exchanged a quick glance. "You won't be able to continue your training," Shadepaw mewed sadly.

"No!" Rowanpaw screeched, taken by anger. "I was supposed to be one of the best bird hunters in FeatherClan, Squirrelfoot said so!"

"Rowanpaw, calm down," Shadepaw interjected quietly, but her littermate thrashed against her.

"And now what? I'm going to retire to the elders' den at the age of eleven moons? Is that all my life will amount to?" Rowanpaw felt like her insides were burning up with the injustice of it all.

A sharp intake of breath from Shadepaw caught her attention. The black she-cat watched her pensively for a moment before making a shaky offer.

"It... It would be a waste for you to retire so young," Shadepaw said. "I know you and I know you like action... The wind in your whiskers... Being at the heart of the Clan. But, given your accident, there's not much you can do in terms of hunting and fighting."

The tabby growled warningly, ready to cut in.

The medicine apprentice raised her tail to show she was not

finished. "So... So I offered for Ravenstar to make me a warrior apprentice so you could take my post as the medicine cat apprentice. That way, you can still feel like part of the Clan."

Rowanpaw watched her littermate shuffle her paws in silence, caught off-guard by her proposition. Shadepaw, who spent their entire kithood following Stormwatcher around, was offering to give up her dream of being a medicine cat to give her littermate a chance at a new life.

"Shadepaw..." Rowanpaw felt her throat constrict at the thought.

The black she-cat pressed her nose into her littermate's tabby fur. "I've thought it over and this is the best choice. For both of us."

The injured she-cat glanced about the dark medicine den, taking in the sweet and tangy scents of herbs, the quiet gurgling of water and the warmth provided by the interwoven branches. In comparison with the bright, cloudless skies and tall pines, spruces and aspens of FeatherClan territory, the den seemed dull and dreary. Yet, the prospect of having no place in the Clan weighed down on Rowanpaw's mind even more heavily. She felt cornered; but what choice did she truly have?

"Alright," she said quietly.

Shadepaw brightened. "Really?"

Rowanpaw twitched her whiskers sadly. "Yes. I know the sacrifice you're making and I'll try my best to fill your paws here. Will you be able to fill my paws out there?" She glanced at the den entrance wistfully.

"I'll try my hardest."

A pause.

"Give Squirrelfoot a hard time for me?"

"Definitely."

"And catch some sparrows while you're at it?"

"They *are* your favourite."

"And avoid thin branches when hunting?"

A sigh. "Of course."

"Thank you."

As Shadepaw exited the den, a nervous tremor to her step, Rowanpaw couldn't help but twitch her whiskers in excitement. If she couldn't be the best hunter in the Clan, she could be one of the best medicine cats the Clan had ever seen; or, at the very least, she could try.

Settling into the moss nest, she let sleep take her, the ache of loss dulled by dreams full of promise.

A/N: Woah, it's been a while since I wrote a one-shot. Once again, it seems I am incapable of short ones (I think the minimum for this challenge was 350 and I managed nearly 1,900...). That might come as a result of my need to develop characters, setting, background, and plot, though, so I hope that pays off in the end.

I'm most interested in hearing your thoughts on the relationships between characters (Rowanpaw and Shadepaw's especially) and the believability of the ending, as I felt it may have been a little rushed.

Wish me luck in the contest (:

A Queen's Grief | WWHQ Official One-Shot Contest #2

A Queen's Grief
WWHQ Official One-Shot Contest #2

The aftermath of battle was never pretty. Sightless eyes stared up hatefully at enemies long gone, their owners' once glossy fur matted with dust and blood. The bramble and thistle barriers had been strewn across the camp, trampled into nothingness just like their fallen comrades. A metallic scent filled the air, so strong it made one choke on their own breath.

And the silence. The silence was deafening.

She sat on the outskirts of the camp, eyes wide as they took in the wreckage. Her heart continued to hammer in her chest even now that the battle was over, and her shallow breathing did little to help. It was all so sudden, so soon.

The day, lit by a bright newleaf sun, started with promise. Being the first warm, sunlit day since the harsh leaf-bare, the Clan took it as a sign of new life and better times ahead. Warriors and apprentices alike took off for the forest in hopes of filling the painfully small freshkill pile; elders bathed in the sun, brushing moss off their pelts as the kits played moss ball around them; Ravenstar, their leader, watched the Clan from High Branch, pelt unusually dark in the bright light.

Then, a battle call, and the camp suddenly flooded with large, dark shapes. Shrieks and screeches rose up as FeatherClan engaged the intruders, bent on protecting their camp and Clan even at the cost of their lives.

The events of the battle blurred in her mind. As pelts the colour of rock and mud headed for the nursery, she threw herself at them in an attempt to keep them from the kits who cowered behind thin

bramble walls. She slashed and hacked and threw blow after blow at the attackers, but the tide never seemed to ebb.

She recalled only one specific moment: the look of pure horror in her own kit's eyes as a giant advanced on him. Caught in a tousle with a battle-scarred she-cat, she cried out for help, hoping against hope that someone would hear her above the din of battle. The tom crept closer to the nursery, claws and fangs at the ready as the kits shrank back and squealed in terror.

With all her strength, she pushed her opponent off and ran, moving as fast as her legs could carry her. She was still too far away when the tom raised his paw to strike, the shriek she let off other-worldly as he went for the blow.

A flash of black and Nightblaze - fierce, fearless Nightblaze - jumped past her to take the giant tom head on. After that, the battle became foggy once more.

She wrapped her speckled tail more tightly around the cream kit at her paws, who did not even give a squeak of protest. Waspkit's eyes were dull as they surveyed the camp and she wondered what the little tom saw in the wreckage.

"Speckleblossom." She glanced up, meeting the amber eyes of her mate. He pressed against her, offering her protection from the cruelty of the battle-torn camp. The queen pressed her head into his chest for only a moment, breathing in the sweet scent of pines that lingered in his pelt.

"You need to see Stormwatcher," she mewed quietly, seeing the bleeding gash in his side.

"As do you," he replied, looking at the wounds on her shoulders and flank pointedly. She thought about arguing, but nodded in agreement soon after. Fighting over such a small thing would not help FeatherClan.

"Go, Lightwhisker," the queen said, seeing Snowtail, the Clan's deputy, rounding up warriors to help repair the camp. "They need you."

The cream tabby hesitated, as if knowing she did not truly want him to leave her side. She averted her eyes to avoid his searching gaze; as much as she wanted to feel his warmth and presence, there would be time for that later. Right now, their Clan needed them.

He touched his nose to her cheek and padded off, leaving her to observe the Clan's efforts. Her breathing was less shallow now, her heart no longer pattering in her chest, and she found she could think more clearly as the adrenaline receded. In its wake, it left grief as heavy as the stones that separated FeatherClan and MoonClan territory.

Her moon old kit had fallen asleep at her paws and she picked him up gently, placing him on what few scraps of moss she managed to find in the damaged nursery. Her gaze softened as she watched his chest rise and fall with breaths that, moments before, could have ceased. Saddened by the thought, she walked into the midst of the camp.

The bodies of the dead were already laid out, lined up neatly in a perfect row. At the end lay Swiftwhisker, a well-respected senior warrior of the Clan. Beside her, the much younger Skunktail wore the same mischievous grin he had in life, though his eyes no longer sparkled.

The grey and white pelt of Sheepfang caught her off-guard and she felt a lump rise into her throat. She pressed her nose into the pelt of her friend, trying to block out the swirl of memories that filled her mind from their time as apprentices and young warriors. To think she could not stand him as a kit... She shook her head, taking a deep breath to calm herself.

The last two bodies belonged to Gooseflight and Nightblaze. Speckleblossom began to shake as she stared down at the older queen and her mate, both killed by a similar blow to the stomach. Gooseflight, always steady and calm in life, appeared the same in death; Nightblaze, full of a fervour for life, appeared the opposite.

"Thank you," the speckled she-cat whispered as she pressed her nose to Nightblaze's dull fur. "You died saving my kit and I will never forget that."

As the other members of FeatherClan approached the bodies to pay their respects, the queen melted back into the crowd. All around her, her Clanmates shook with anger and sorrow and cries of grief filled the air.

Unable to watch as Nettleflower, Sheepfang's mate, and their three kits, Frostpaw, Birchpaw and Lilypaw, began to sob, Speckleblossom turned away. Eyes glossing over, she almost passed over the image of a small, lone kit sitting on the fringes of the Clan. His head was bowed, eyes trained on the ground, tail wrapped neatly around his little pebble-sized paws.

Glancing back at Nightblaze and Gooseflight, the weight in her chest grew, as if trying to crush her with despair. So many lives pointlessly taken before their time... And now, an innocent, orphaned kit stood at the edge of Clan life, lost.

"Volekit?" she said quietly, lowering herself to the ground. The tom remained still, unmoving. Swallowing back her grief, Speckleblossom crawled closer.

"Little one," she whispered gently and the tiny brown tom began to shake. From his mouth came a stream of senseless whimpers and soft cries, an eerie song of loss.

Her motherly instinct took over and she wrapped her body around the little tom, sharing her warmth and life until the shaking lessened and, finally, subsided. The whimpers and cries faded out, replaced by the even, short breathing of a kit asleep.

Speckleblossom sighed, knowing sleep would not take the pain of loss away; at least the kit would get some rest before another day of sorrow. Watching him, she wondered if he would be more like his father, calm and collected, or like his mother, always searching for excitement. Though he would never truly know them, she knew their spirits would live within him.

The queen tucked the tom in with her own kit, the moon old kits huddling together unconsciously. She purred, struck by how similar they seemed. A new thought filled her as she paused, observing their dreaming state, and suddenly the sorrow lifted.

She joined the Clan in their vigil with the warriors, settling down beside Nightblaze and pressing her nose into her cheek softly. The image of Waspkit and Volekit continued to fill Speckleblossom's mind and she twitched her whiskers, filled with the warmth of hope.

"He will make you proud," she whispered into the fallen queen's ear. "They will both make us proud. And I will be there to make sure Volekit knows just how much he is loved, even though you have left us. He will be loved, my friend."

A warm breeze blew through the newleaf night as she closed her eyes; a sign, perhaps, of Nightblaze's presence, or simply a wind like any other.

A/N: A short piece I decided to write for WarriorsWeeklyHQ's one-shot contest. I took a rather round-about approach to the theme (the death of a loved one), but I think it paid off in the end. I wanted to focus mainly on character development and emotion so let me know how I did in those departments! It's a bitter-sweet ending, but sometimes those are the best kind (:

Kits Will Be Kits | WattyClans WC R2

Kits Will Be Kits
WattyClans Writing Competition - Round 2

"Speckleblossom, can we go outside?"

The pale tortoiseshell queen blinked her eyes open to see two pairs of pleading eyes staring her in the face. Twitching her whiskers, she gave a big yawn and lifted herself from her nest. Bits of dirt and moss clung to her already patched pelt, adding unexpected pops of colour.

"I don't know if you can," she said, pulling her tongue over a paw and the paw over her ear. "Have you been good?"

She watched with amusement as Volekit shuffled his paws nervously, glancing over at Waspkit, who jumped up and down excitedly.

"Yes, Speckleblossom, I've been good!" the cream-striped tom said, nudging Volekit. His smaller adopted brother nodded hastily, enthusiasm returning.

"Well..." She drew out her decision, holding back a purr as the kits' eyes widened in apprehension.

"Yes, of course you can," she sighed, flicking her tail over their ears. "Just stay out of trouble. And don't leave the camp!"

"Of course!" Volekit squeaked, hurrying after Waspkit, who had already sped out of the den.

The queen watched them go, settling in the late newleaf sunlight outside of the nursery. At first, she kept a watchful eye over the two four-moon-old kits; ever since the death of Volekit's real mother,

Speckleblossom had taken it upon herself to raise her friend's son as her own, and she could not bare the thought of anything happening to either of the little toms.

Their antics proved entertaining as they first stalked Snowtail, the Clan's deputy, and then Rowanpaw, the medicine cat apprentice. She stifled a snort of laughter as Squirrelfoot, quirky as always, fell in step behind the kits and began to stalk them without their notice. He pounced and the kits squealed in fright, quickly turning on the warrior and vanquishing him with their tiny claws.

Knowing the two were in safe paws, Speckleblossom took to grooming the dust and moss from her pelt. No sooner had she completed her task than a cream tabby tom approached her.

"You look ravishing, as always," he purred, brushing his cheek against hers.

She pulled back, his whiskers tickling her nose. "And you are charming, as always, Lightwhisker."

"I try," he said, touching his nose to hers. Speckleblossom stayed there, breathing in his scent.

"What are your plans for the day?" she asked. Out of the corner of her eye, she spotted the kits batting at the herbs Rowanpaw had laid out in the sun.

"Ravenstar and Snowtail are sending out multiple patrols to make sure that mountain lion is nowhere in sight," Lightwhisker replied. "After MoonClan's announcement at the last Gathering, everyone's been on edge."

Speckleblossom stiffened at the news. "Why would a mountain lion venture into our forest?"

The tom shrugged. "Lack of food? Maybe he got tired of tough MoonClan meat."

The queen nudged the tom forcefully, giving him a disapproving look.

"Who knows?" he said, though he licked her cheek in apology. "Don't worry, though, if it's on the territory we'll find it and drive it out. You, and our lovely kits, will be safe."

Warmth spread through Speckleblossom at his words and she pushed her nose into his chest in a sudden rush of affection. She could feel the vibrations of his purrs and wondered how she had ever gotten so lucky to have him as a mate.

A shout from the camp entrance startled them and Lightwhisker licked his chest fur flat quickly.

"I better get going," he said. "I'll see you at sun-down?"

She nodded, already looking forward to sharing tongues with the tom later.

The camp emptied quickly, two or three patrols heading out to scour the territory. Foxfeather and her kits lay sleeping in the nursery until sunhigh, while the elders basked in the light of the sun. Speckleblossom found herself closing her eyes, letting the warmth seep into her fur.

When she woke, the sun was just past its zenith and slowly starting to descend. Stretching, the queen looked about the camp. Some of the mentors and apprentices had returned for a quick break after training before heading back out to hunt but, otherwise, the camp was still. Too still for housing two enthusiastic kits.

Shaking her head, Speckleblossom padded over to the medicine den. Poking her head in, she saw Stormwatcher and Rowanpaw going over the contents of the medicine storage.

"Have either of you seen Waspkit or Volekit?" she asked politely.

Rowanpaw shook her head. "They were pawing at the herbs and I had to chase them away earlier. I haven't seen them since then."

The tortoiseshell nodded her head in apology, wary of angering the apprentice. Ever since her tree-climbing accident and subsequent inability to become a warrior, Rowanpaw had been very touchy.

She headed over to the elders next who, very sleepily, admitted they had told the kits a story earlier, but had not seen them anywhere after that. A nervous flutter in her chest, the queen continued her search.

Finally, she caught their scent near the camp entrance. Heart jumping into her throat, she gazed out at the forest beyond with a growing feeling of foreboding.

"Did Volekit and Waspkit come through here?" she asked Yewstrike and Minkface, who stood guarding the camp. Both young warriors shook their heads.

StarClan, why do you put these ideas in my head? The queen shook her head against the images of all the dangers the kits could have encountered, each one worse than the last. Her pace increased as she followed their scent out into the forest.

The usual scents of the woods filled her nose - mice and birds, sap and pollen - but the she-cat continued to race through the undergrowth, mind suddenly filled with the image of a mountain lion prowling through the trees and preying on her kits.

Then, a high-pitched yowl pierced through the trees.

Ears swivelling, Speckleblossom ran as fast as her legs could carry her, weaving through the trees expertly. From what she could tell, the sound had come from the Willow Pool, and that was the first place she would expect a mountain lion to go after a long trip from the mountain tops.

The gleam of water appeared through the low hanging branches of the willows around her and Speckleblossom burst through the curtain of leaves, ready to protect her kits at all costs.

Instead, her widened eyes took in a very peculiar sight: a very scared looking Volekit staring down at a frog while Waspkit rolled around on the forest floor, cackling.

"Where have you been?" she asked, her strict tone cracking with relief.

The two kits turned simultaneously, eyes wide.

"We just wanted to see the Willow Pool," Volekit said quietly, gazing down at his paws.

"Yeah, and Volekit got scared by a frog!" Waspkit added pointing his tail at the amphibian. The frog ribbitted and hopped away, sending Volekit scrambling away from it.

"It attacked me!" Volekit protested, watching the frog with trepidation.

"You could have been attacked by a mountain lion!" the she-cat replied, some of her earlier fear returning. Looking at the two completely safe kits, she felt she could almost laugh at her own overactive imagination now.

She wrapped her tail around the two toms, swiping her tongue over their heads. "Doesn't matter, I'm glad you're safe. Time to head back to camp, alright?" The two kits bowed their heads in defeat.

On their way back, Snowtail's patrol found them. All of its members were panting and looked like they had run through the thickest bramble bushes.

"We heard a kit yowl, what's wrong?" the deputy asked, looking between Speckleblossom and her charges.

"Nothing to worry about," the queen replied. "Just a frog attack."

The patrol looked at her in disbelief for a moment before breaking into purrs of amusement, nudging the kits playfully.

"I'm glad," Lightwhisker said, picking Waspkit up by the scruff. "That mountain lion would have gobbled you up in seconds."

"Mountain lion?" Volekit asked, trembling.

"Don't worry," Squirrelfoot assured him. "We saw it moving its way back into MoonClan territory. It won't bother us for a while."

Both Volekit and Speckleblossom heaved a sigh of relief.

"Frogs, however, I can't vouch for," the grey tom added with a mischievous glint in his eye.

The two kits raced after the warrior as he leaped away, ribbiting the entire way to camp.

Kits will be kits, the queen thought as she watched them. Remembering her earlier panic, she sighed. *I guess mothers will be mothers, too.*

A/N: Surprise! Not what you were expecting to happen, now was it? I thought I'd throw in a cute little twist there - I felt like writing something a little more light-hearted for once rather than dramatic and tragic . The prompt also stated the kit could be in any kind of distress, and Volekit was *clearly* distressed. I might be taking a big risk here for the competition, but I think it will be worth it. Thanks for reading!

Direction | WattyClans WC R3

Direction
WattyClans Writing Competition - Round 3

Late greenleaf had always been Squirrelfoot's favourite season. The way the leaves slowly began to change but clung to the last remnants of green; the breeze, both warm and cool at once; the birds as they chattered all they could before the silence of leaf-bare descended.

The grey warrior found solace as he padded through FeatherClan, heading for the HollyClan border. His patrol had dispersed throughout the territory, searching for any scent trails of HollyClan intruders. He had offered to patrol the border itself, giving him a reason to stay close to the meeting place.

That was the other thing that brought him peace after moons of self-doubt – Spottedfern. The HollyClan she-cat could make him feel safe with just a brush of her brown ticked tail, confident with just a soft-spoken word. He had stayed up many nights, lying in his nest and wishing they were of the same Clan.

He settled by the border near a tall oak, eyes on the opposite side in hopes of spying Spottedfern's green eyes or ticked fur. The sun filtered in through the canopy, trying to trick him as it caught the brown bark of a tree or a particularly emerald leaf.

Something chattered above him and he turned to see a starling sitting high up in the oak. It regarded him with beady black eyes, almost mockingly, and Squirrelfoot felt his neck fur bristle. Memories came flooding back, a starling in a tree and a brown she-cat carefully sliding towards it – then, a crack, and a whirlwind of colour as she disappeared.

He shook at the thoughts and pushed them even further away than before. I'm so sorry Rowanpaw.

"I wasn't aware that FeatherClan allowed its warriors to rest on the border. It must be a new way to patrol."

Squirrelfoot whipped around, hazel eyes wide. He spotted the fluffy white tom immediately, yellow eyes glowing, on HollyClan's side of the border. oWhitefur, he remembered from Gatherings, the deputy of HollyClan. Belatedly, he realized the tom was waiting for a response.

"I... FeatherClan... I just got distracted." He stumbled over the words.

"That was your signal to leave from here before I find your dawdling to be a threat to my Clan's safety," the older tom snorted pointedly. Even from across the border, he was intimidating. However, Squirrelfoot refused to let him think so.

"*Your* Clan's safety?" he replied. "HollyClan's the one whose been stealing FeatherClan's prey. Just yesterday I followed a scent trail into our territory and back across your border."

Whitefur puffed himself up, white fur bushier than normal. "HollyClan has kept to our side of the territory just as we always have. I do recall seeing you for the past few days on this very border loitering. Explain that."

Squirrelfoot's mind raced to come up with a plausible answer. He could not let the deputy of HollyClan know that he was waiting for Spottedfern – that would spell trouble for both of them. "Snowtail believes that someone is crossing the border," he finally said. I'm here to stop them should they come by." He puffed his chest out proudly.

The deputy rolled his eyes in response. "Yes, you are a very formidable force and my Clanmates would fear your very presence here. May StarClan save us all from your diligent watch on our actions."

His own eyes narrowed. "I happen to be one of the most promising young warriors in FeatherClan."

"You are the best FeatherClan has to offer, huh," Whitefur began. "Tell me, how is Rowanpaw doing? Is she recovering well? That fall must have been so tough for her."

Squirrelfoot flinched at the comment, the hurt he had tried to hard to hide ever since Rowanpaw's accident simmering deep in his chest and stomach. Most of FeatherClan blamed him for his apprentice's fall – only Ravenstar and Stormwatcher seemed to be on his side. He was an outcast, unwanted.

Whitefur seemed to notice his reaction. "I... apologize. I truly did not mean to tarnish the event and I know it was not your fault." He stepped forward, scuffing the dirt with a paw. "Is Rowanpaw ok?"

"She's Stormwatcher's apprentice now," Squirrelfoot replied solemnly, referring to his Clan's medicine cat. "Shadepaw let her littermate take on the healer role so she could still feel useful to the Clan."

"That's good," Whitefur mumbled awkwardly. His ears pricked suddenly as a loud crack came from further down the border. It sounded like something large had fallen over.

A cry followed the crash and Squirrelfoot looked over at Whitefur uncertainly. It was unlike any cry he had heard before, loud and piercing, but not feline in the slightest.

"What in the world...?" Whitefur trailed off, peering through the trees. He padded off towards the sound, slinking carefully through the undergrowth. Squirrelfoot marvelled that such a fluffy cat could get through the low-hanging branches without snagging his fur.

He padded after the white-furred tom, careful to keep to his side of the border. The wailing grew louder and louder as they travelled until finally he glimpsed its source through the undergrowth.

"Whitefur!" he hissed, fur on end as the Twoleg kit turned its head in their general direction.

"I see it," the HollyClan deputy responded. Pressing themselves lower to the ground, they watched as it wailed, cradling its arm

close to its chest.

"I think... I think it's injured."

Squirrelfoot blinked, taking a closer look through the screen of leaves. Sure enough, the kit's paw was at a weird angle. He scrunched up his nose as the scent of blood hit him.

"What do we do?" he asked.

"Well it definitely can't stay here," Whitefur stated. "It's scaring off all the prey. We need to move it somehow." The kit sniffled and wiped its nose with one large paw– the seemingly uninjured one.

Squirrelfoot felt something like pity beneath his fear of the Twoleg. It was a kit, after all. Slowly, he padded forwards, wondering if it would notice him. He stopped suddenly when its wide brown eyes turned in his direction. It stopped wailing for a moment, the corners of its mouth moving slightly.

"What now?" he hissed.

Whitefur stepped up beside Squirrelfoot. "If it's a kit then its mother might come to look for it and that's dangerous. We need to bring it to the nearest Twolegplace and hope that's where it is from."

Squirrelfoot looked at the older tom as if he were mad. "And how do you propose we do that?"

The white deputy scanned the clearing. "We both know the nearest Twolegplace is at the end of the border. What we need to do is make it head towards the Twolegplace. They are pretty mobile as kits I think; we can probably lure it to the Twolegplace."

The warrior blinked again. "Lure it?" He was one of FeatherClan's swiftest hunters, but playing the part of prey, especially for a Twoleg, made him very uncomfortable. He glanced at the Twoleg kit apprehensively ; it stared right back at him with those glassy brown eyes. Swallowing hard, the grey tom moved closer to it, glancing over at Whitefur.

"Do you want to take the lead on this one?" He was loathe to give the HollyClan deputy leadership of their 'mission', but the fact remained that the white tom was older – and more experienced – than he was.

Whitefur gave the FeatherClan tom a sidelong glance but stepped forward obligingly.

"Twoleg kits are known to love cats," he said. "They always run after them. If I'm right, we can slowly lure the kit by pretending to let it touch us, then enticing it to move to Twolegplace."

Squirrelfoot looked at him like he was crazy. Next thing he knew, Whitefur had stepped out of their shelter, heading straight for the Twoleg kit.

"Hello Twoleg!" he mewed loudly.

The grey tom halted, wide-eyed, waiting for the Twoleg kit's next move. It blinked at them slowly before extending its uninjured paw forward. Squirrelfoot retreated a couple of steps, watching.

Whitefur's fur stood on end as the kit's huge paw reached out for him. He let it come so close Squirrelfoot found himself holding his breath. He released it with a loud sigh when the deputy backed up at the last moment. The kit let out a gurgle and moved to get to its feet.

"Looks like it's working," Squirrelfoot murmured, not taking his eyes off the Twoleg kit. It wobbled slightly as it stood on its hind legs, reaching for them once more. Its third swipe nearly caught Whitefur's tail.

"Point me to the Twolegplace," the white tom managed to get out.

Squirrelfoot flicked his tail in a northernly direction. They would have to travel along the borderline between FeatherClan and HollyClan to get there.

"Better get moving," he said, scurrying out of the kit's reach.

Whitefur waved his tail enticingly as he followed, nearly tripping over a branch. The kit seemed to have forgotten about its pain for the moment.

"I hate this," he grumbled, so quietly Squirrelfoot nearly missed it, as the kit's paw actually brushed through his fur.

Squirrelfoot's smirk quickly disappeared as the kit directed its attention to him and almost grabbed his own bushy tail. The kit gurgled happily, turning its attention back to Whitefur. They were only a couple of foxlengths from where they had started and the sun was already slowly beginning to sink behind the treeline.

"We won't be back until moonhigh at this rate," Squirrelfoot grumbled.

"As long as we get this away I don't care if it takes all night."

The kit tripped suddenly, hitting the ground with a heavy thud. Whitefur let out a loud groan as its face screwed up, becoming red. It let out a piercing wail.

Squirrelfoot nearly jumped out of his fur. The kit's cries were so loud he could practically hear the scurrying of feet and flap of wings as the forest reacted.

Throwing all caution to the wind, the tom raced over to the kit. "We need to quiet it down," he meowed over his shoulder. To his surprise, the Twoleg glanced up at him, though its face remained red. An idea hit him.

"Oh, alright," he said, more to himself than anyone else. He swished his bushy tail, flinching slightly as it brushed over the Twoleg's face. The wailing turned into gurgles.

Whitefur moved forward to stand with Squirrelfoot. "It's okay little kit. Let's keep going."

The kit did not react.

"Let's go!" the deputy began sharply, but froze as its face scrunched up again. "Oh mousedung," he cursed. Squirrelfoot shot

him a disapproving look. His head was already pounding from the kit's crying. It didn't look like either of them were having any luck.

"I have an idea," he said. Stepping forward carefully, the tom brushed his tail over the kit's shoulder. When it seemed to respond, he took a deep breath and walked past again, brushing his side against it.

Whitefur followed his lead, brushing up against on the kit on its other side. The wails died out, though it still sniffled as it reached out towards them. When Whitefur darted out of the way, it began gurgling in frustration, face turning an angry red.

"I hate myself right now," the white tom told Squirrelfoot. The FeatherClan warrior watched as Whitefur took a deep breath and finally allowed the kit to grab him.

Squirrelfoot tried his hardest to smother his laughter – then his squeak as the Twoleg reached for him.

"I think I'll lead the way," he said. Turning to hide his amusement, the grey tom began to pad up the borderline. Behind him, Whitefur let out a string of curses as the kit lifted him up. Now that it had caught one of them, it seemed to be moving faster.

In no time at all, they had reached the Twolegplace.

"Okay, enough of that," Squirrelfoot heard Whitefur say and the white tom dropped down to land beside the warrior. He shook out his fur, puffing it out comically.

"Promise me you will not speak a word of this to anyone," he hissed.

"On my ancestors in StarClan," Squirrelfoot replied, though he could not keep his whiskers from twitching. Whitefur did not seem to believe him, but he did not have a chance to comment as they felt the stomp of a large Twoleg. It was quickly followed by a cry of relief.

"Hide!" Whitefur advised. He darted under a nearby bush, Squirrelfoot right behind him, unwilling to fall into the hands of a

Twoleg. He shimmied closer to the older tom, the ferns closing in around them. Together, they watched the large Twoleg sweep the kit into its arms, cooing the whole while. Though his entire body felt tight, Squirrelfoot felt a part of him fill with relief at the sight.

"Looks like our mission is over," he whispered.

Whitefur turned his head subtly to the FeatherClan tom. "Let's get back before our Clanmates miss us."

Squirrelfoot was surprised at the disappointment that filled him but nodded his head all the same. He let the older tom take the lead.

They padded back to their original meeting spot, dusk filtering through the forest around them. Only their paws created sound on the few fallen leaves, the wind rustling the still-green ones above. The air around the border was tainted with the scent of blood.

"You did very good today," Whitefur began as they walked. "You were very innovative and quick on your paws."

Unused to praise, as he had not been an apprentice for nearly a season now, Squirrelfoot twitched his whiskers with pride in response. "Thank you, but I couldn't have done it on my own. You were the braver one of the two of us."

Whitefur flicked his tail dismissively. "Sure I let it touch me, but when I almost messed this all up you were the one to fix it with your quick thinking."

"If only FeatherClan could see me that way," the grey tom replied dejectedly. After working so closely with Whitefur and seeing what teamwork could accomplish, Squirrelfoot longed to be treated similarly in his own Clan. Following Rowanpaw's accident that seemed impossible.

"Perhaps you need to convince them that you are ready to try again." The white tom let a smirk cross his face. "You can start with this. I won't even get mad if you embellish it to favour yourself."

Squirrelfoot perked up. "Really? I mean, I'm sure our versions

wouldn't quite match up if I 'embellished' it." Not to mention Spottedfern was more likely to hear Whitefur's side of the story.

"Well all we have to do is tell the truth. We heard the Twoleg kit, you scented it out, I realized we needed to bring it back, and you had the genius idea to use ourselves as bait for it."

Squirrelfoot mulled the story over. "I guess you're right." Then, "Thanks for working with me."

Whitefur swished his tail once more. "It was a pleasure." They stopped, turning to each other. "I do apologize for what I said. Not only was it uncouth for a cat of my age and stature, it was mean. And very unlike me."

The grey warrior's whiskers twitched. "It's alright, nothing to lose fur over." He nearly made a joke of the HollyClan deputy's abundance of fluff before thinking better of it.

Instead, he moved deliberately away from the border – their camaraderie had to end at one point. "I'm honoured to have worked alongside a warrior such as yourself but I think we should be getting back to our Clanmates now." The sky was almost completely dark now and he knew his patrol would be looking for him.

Whitefur's whiskers twitched in amusement. "Don't be a stranger at the Gatherings," he ordered before disappearing into HollyClan territory.

I won't, Squirrelfoot thought as he watched the warrior go. The emotions flitting through him were bittersweet. Though he did not get a chance to meet with Spottedfern at the border today, his meeting and subsequent mission with Whitefur felt so much more important all of a sudden. For the first time in days, the warrior felt as if he were valuable and not just a burden to his Clan.

With one last look over the border, he slunk back into the undergrowth of FeatherClan territory, a slight skip in his step and thoughts of a warm nest filling his head. Just another reason to love late greenleaf.

A/N: Whitefur belong to the wonderful Blazestorm who is the other contestant for the final round of this WattyClans contest. Go check out her contest piece!